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ABSTRACT

An alternative method of language learning is proposed based on the theory of "Personal Construct Psychology." It is suggested as a resolution of the impasse that seems to exist between linguistic and psychological theories of learning. Certain techniques are offered to enable learners to exteriorize their cognitive categories and their own learning modalities and processes. These techniques are considered to be of interest not only to teachers and methodologists who are interested in the learning process, but also to learners who would like to improve their learning capacity. After the presentation of the more theoretical aspects of the proposal, a language learning technique, sensitization, is examined and examples are given. (Author/AMH)

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P. RILEY

MUD AND STARS
PERSONNAL CONSTRUCTS, SENSITIZATION AND LEARNING

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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RESUME

Les récents travaux en linguistique appliquée ont attiré l'attention sur la spécificité de l'apprentissage des langues par rapport à l'enseignement. Mais peu de théories linguistiques ou psychologiques portent sur le processus d'apprentissage en tant que tel : les linguistes n'ont aucun moyen de vérifier si leurs descriptions théoriques ont un quelconque rapport avec la réalité des cheminements d'apprentissage et les psychologues sont divisés entre les partisans de l'étude des comportements observables mais d'intérêt restreint et ceux de l'analyse des processus internes de la pensée, qui sont inobservables. Pour sortir de cette impasse, une théorie anglo-saxonne, *Personal Construct Psychology*, propose des techniques pour « extérioriser » les catégories et les cheminements d'apprentissage individuels. Ces techniques offrent des perspectives intéressantes non seulement pour les didacticiens intéressés par les processus d'apprentissage mais aussi pour les apprenants qui veulent améliorer leurs capacités d'apprentissage.

Les deux premières parties de cet article examinent les problèmes linguistiques et psychologiques soulevés par l'étude des processus d'apprentissage et présentent brièvement les théories de *Personal Construct Psychology*. La dernière partie examine, à partir d'exemples concrets, les implications de la sensibilisation envisagée comme technique d'enseignement/apprentissage utilisant les catégories cognitives propres à l'apprenant.

This paper was given at the Berne Colloquium on Applied Linguistics, June 1980. We are grateful to the organizers for their k'nd permission to publish it here.

" Two men looked out through prison bars
One saw mud, the other, stars. "

Introductory Note.

This paper is a kite-flying exercise : it tries to relate certain recent developments in psychology with a particular pedagogical practise. But the psychological approach in question, — Personal Construct Theory, — is virtually unknown in applied linguistics circles, and the pedagogical practise, — Sensitization — has never, as far as I know, been the subject of any serious investigation. The result is therefore both programmatic and sketchy, though where possible I have tried to give concrete examples, and may turn out simply to be a resounding statement of the obvious. But after all,

" A child, when it begins to speak,
learns what it is that it knows. "

(J.H. Wheelock)

ON DESCRIPTIONS

" *A rose is a rose is a rose.* "

(G. Stein)

The meta-theoretical point which will be made in this section is neither complex nor new : it is simply that theoretical descriptions are not to be identified with the objects they describe. It follows that the theoretical descriptions of the constituent parts of complex objects are not freely interchangeable.

Now the description of any complex object requires that a minimum of the constituent parts be recognised : for the complex object language, terminology varies considerably, but it is common to recognise three constituents which will here be labelled

(1) capacity, (2) process, (3) product.

Theoretical descriptions of *Products*, then, are to be distinguished from theoretical descriptions of *Processes* and both are to be distinguished in turn from theoretical descriptions of *Capacities*. As Andrew Chesterman (1977) has pointed out, much of the confusion in psycholinguistics has been due to precisely this failure to observe these meta-theoretical demarcation lines.

If we distinguish, then, between the study of language

A — As a *capacity*, i.e. whatever it is " inside their heads " which enables people to speak, the " faculté de langage " ;

B — as behaviour, i.e. what people do when they communicate, the communicative *process* ;

C — as a *product* of capacity and process,

we must also distinguish between

A^1 a description of capacity
B^1 a description of process
C^1 a description of product.

Chesterman (1977) argues convincingly that " The Psychoolinguistic Fallacy "

> " ... was to mistake C_1 for B_1 and A_1 — to assume the formal processes used by the grammar actually represented the productive and perceptive processes of language behaviour (B) and that grammatical constructs like deep structure actually existed in peoples' heads. "

Such confusions have only been encouraged by the Chomskyan notion of *competence* which, Janus-like, looks to intuitions based on capacity A to help formulate the terms of the description A_1, glossing over the differences. Yet earlier Chomsky (1965) seemed to warn against this line of reasoning :

> " A generative grammar is not a model for a speaker or hearer... when we say that a sentence has a certain derivation with respect to a particular generative grammar, we say nothing about how the speaker or hearer might proceed, in some pratical or efficient way, to construct such a derivation. "

It is difficult to square this with his notorious " systematic ambiguity " whereby grammatical descriptions B_1, C_1 are actually identified with capacities and processes A, B. Indeed, Chomsky insists (private communication 1978) that transformational generative grammar " has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of mental processes ".

Of course, this is only one particular instance of a failure to observe the set of distinctions which Chesterman has so lucidly set out, but the objection is one which can be generalised to all such epistemological short-cuts.

The line of reasoning being followed here has a number of important theoretical and practical implications, but from the point of view of our immediate interests — the pedagogical description and presentation of language — there is one which is absolutely crucial, namely that theoretical linguistic descriptions of, say, products are not to be confused with descriptions of capacity — and even less with psycho-pedagogical descriptions of the acquisition of capacity. All too often, the term *pedagogical grammar* is used in ways which reveal this underlying confusion.

To a considerable extent this underlines the point that Applied Linguistics is not merely Linguistics applied, that a wide range of situational, social and personal factors — ranging from company policy to the weather — will influence who learns what, where, when and how. It also hammers in the point that theories of teaching are not theories of learning : they describe different objects, which in turn have different loci. Finally, it emphasises the danger of imposing units developed for the description of one object on a second and different object : units of grammar are not units of learning i.e. we must distinguish between the conceptual tools and operations which a learner uses in the process of second language acquisition and those which the linguist uses in the description of the product (Candlin, 1973).

In the light of the above discussion, it is possible to formulate some *fundamental requirements for an adequate psychological model of second language learning,* though this list will not, of course, be anything like exhaustive :

Such a model should be learner-centered : this should be pleonastic but unfortunately, as we have seen, it is not, although recent discussions of the Input-Intake-Output distinction have done much to clarify matters. (Corder, 1969). Secondly, it should focus on the learning process not on the activity of teaching, and thirdly it should describe that process in terms of the learner's own categories and operations, not those of the observer[1]. Since these categories and operations differ from individual to individual, the model should be sufficiently powerful to generate descriptions for different individuals and to generalise from them, to account for both minds and mind.

[1] At the risk of labouring the point, it is worth noting that neither the theorist nor the teacher have the slightest choice about this, since they cannot learn on behalf of the learner.

To perform this task of generalisation, without which the model cannot be said to exist except in some inchoate, introspective way, it is necessary :

(a) To have access to the individual learner's cognitive categories, and

(b) to render them observable.

These dual requirements have hitherto been regarded as completely incompatible, since all that is " subjective " has been taken as unobservable and all that is observable fails to account for " subjective " categories. It is this which has given rise to the major rift between the " Humanistic " and " Behaviouristic " schools of psychology : Humanistic psychology is criticised by the Behaviourists because it is unscientific, Behaviouristic psychology is criticised by the Humanists because it is trivial.

This is where Personal Construct Theory comes in, it seems to me, since it offers both a model and a method for the observation of subjective variables. The pioneering work which has been carried out at the Centre for the Study of Human Learning, Brunel University, seems to confirm this (— though none of that work has concentrated specifically on *language* learning). So, too, does our work at the C.R.A.P.E.L. — although it has not been consciously carried out as research into Personal Construct Psychology. As yet, therefore, no work has been done on adapting the techniques of Personal Construct Psychology to the investigation and furthering of the language-learning process.

Nonetheless, work on autonomous learning (Holec, 1980) and on self-assessment (Oskarsson, 1977), shows such a high degree of congruity in methods, aims and interests that there is every reason to be optimistic about the prospects for the development of a psychological model of second language learning.

PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY

" *Orthodoxy is my doxy : heterodoxy is another man's doxy.* "

(Warburton)

It is obviously impossible to summarise a psychological theory in a couple of paragraphs. The interested reader is therefore referred to the various works included in the bibliography : what follows here is an attempt to give a very general idea of the intellectual stance involved in this approach, although even this incurs the risk of caricature :

Personal Construct Theory is a " total psychology ", by which I understand its proponents to mean that it is both a theory of the person and a theory of knowing : it is, then, a *meta-theoretical epistemics*, a theroy of the ontogenesis of meaning, in that it studies the individual's apprehension and categorisation of knowledge. Knowledge is knowledge of order, the order created by the individual when he imposes the organisation of his cognitive categories on the chaos which surrounds him. The focus of Personal Construct Theory, then, is the individual, his forms of appraisal and his construing of events : the aim of Personal Construct Psychology is the identification, observation and extension of his cognitive categories and their operations.

Personal Construct Psychology, is, therefore, essentially relativistic. Its epistemological pedigree is a long one going back, I suppose, to Protogoras : " Man is the measure of all things. " But it was George Kelly who founded, formulated and systematised the modern school. Kelly brought to his psychological studies the interest in relativity which has been one of the outstanding characteristics of the intellectual history of this century. Names like Sapir, Whorf, Heisenberg, Einstein, Mead, and Levy-Strauss, testify to the extent and importance of this trend.

As was to be expected, Kelly's work was completely ignored by the Behaviourists : there is a clear parallel here with the reception given to the ideas of Sapir and Worf (1956) by Bloomfield and the Structuralists : they were also rejected as being " unscientific ", since they involved unobservables[2]. Nonetheless, he seems to have exercised a great influence on such thinkers as Rogers (1977), Illich (1970) and Pirsig (1976) as this quotation will show :

> " I have raised the question as to whether psychology will remain a narrow technological fragment of a science, tied to an outdated philosophical conception of itself, clinging to a security blanket of observable behaviours only ; or whether it can possibly become a truly broad and creative science, rooted in subjective vision, open to all aspects of the human conditions worthy of the name of a mature science. "
>
> (Rogers, quoted in Giorgi, 1977)

[2] Although Whorf and Kelly have a great deal in common, there are also considerable differences between their approaches. In particular, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis involves external, social categories — those of the language — which are imposed on our perception of reality (much the same is true for the work of later linguists such as Bernstein and Halliday, 1973).

Personal Construct Theory deals with the personal selections, operations and interpretations which an individual makes on the basis of the (social ?) options available to him.

Ironically, Kelly criticised Rogers and the Humanists because they were insufficiently scientific, since they did not develop any rigorous techniques for observation.

Kelly's rejection of the physical sciences paradigm as a model for psychological investigation is a direct result of his emphasis on the relativity of individual cognition. He argued that not only is the empirical method not the only way of doing science, but that it is the wrong way to develop a science of the person, its very objectivity being an insurmountable barrier ; a psychology which imposes " objective ", external categories, — whether they are Freud's or Skinner's — falls into Chesterman's fallacy, by confusing the units of a description of one object which those of another. Freud's categories for describing and analysing my behaviour are not *my* categories : to understand my own cognitive processes, I need to know the bases on which I go about construing my world, what categories I use — " Know thyself ". And the same holds for anyone who wants to understand me, rather than explain me [3].

This radical shift in perspective obliges us to reconsider and redefine just what we mean by " scientific " and " scientific method ". For the applied linguist who is afraid of getting out of his depth, there are at least two important sources of encouragement : the first is that in the physical sciences themselves the concept of relativity and the view of scientific definitions as semantic constructs is now a commonplace. Clearly this springs from the work of Einstein and Heisenberg, but both the methodological and epistemological implications have been systematised by Bachelard (1934). Secondly, we should be aware that, from the historical point of view, such shifts in perspective are by no means unusual ; indeed the development from heresy to scientific orthodoxy so richly documented by Kuhn (1962) is itself sufficient reason to take a relativistic attitude towards even the most objective scientific knowledge.

A direct consequence of this rejection of the physical sciences paradigm is the changed role of the *experiment* in Personal Construct Theory, where it is seen more as *une expérience* in which the scientist actively participates along with the other participants. The problem of " alienation " or " observer effect " has long been recognised, above all in the social sciences (Rosenthal, 1963), where it has been shown time and again that the more controlled the experiment the more trivial the results. The position of the Personal Construct Theorists is, in a nutshell, that since they cannot prevent " observer effect " from occurring, it is far more scientific to acknowledge the fact and subject their behaviour to the same scrutiny as that of the other participants. Too bad if the Social Scientist loses his aura of Olympian objectivity : he never really deserved it anyway.

[3] It is well worth while asking how it happens that Freudian analysts always get " Freudian " patients, Jungian analysts " Jungian " patients, and so on !

This necessity to study the nature of the involvement of the investigator in the experimental activity, above all his relationships with and influence on the other participants, has produced a considerable literature on conversational heuristics (Fransella, 1977) since this is obviously the " interface " between observer and observed and indeed is often the actual locus of the experiment. In many ways this overlaps with the work dealing with the role of the Helper or Counsellor in autonomous learning schemes. (Rogers, 1972, Henner-Stanchina, 1976). But the conversational tools and technique which the Personal Construct Psychologists have developed seem to me to have no counterparts in language teaching/learning. Insofar as these tools aim at helping the learner to learn by making him conscious of his own motivations, priorities, interests, attitudes, etc., they are of immediate and practical interest to us. Whether they will be directly transferable to *language* learning in a more detailed way remains to be seen.

In Personal Construct terms, an individual learns when he extends his personal system of meaning, that is, when he adds to or refines his set of personal constructs. Amendments to this cognitive map [4] come about, consciously or unconsciously, through experience " as constructs which are hierarchically organised into a system within which meaning is attributed, sorted and applied ". (Harri-Augstein, 1977).

Since each individual has his own cognitive map and will add to it idiosyncratically, the most powerful aids to learning will be those which reveal to him the nature of his map, which provide him with a model of his world. The development of such aids has been a major aim of Personal Construct Psycho-

[4] Lewis Carroll's map paradox is delightfully appropriate here :

" 'That's another thing we've learned from *your* Nation,' said Mein Herr, 'map-making. But we've carried it much further than *you*. What do you consider the *largest* map that would be really useful ?'

'About six inches to the mile.'

'About six inches !' exclaimed Mein Herr. 'We very soon got to six *yards* to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all ! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a *mile to the mile* !'

'Have you used it much ?' I enquired.

'It has never been spread out, yet.' said Mein Herr : 'the farmers objected : they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight ! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.' "

(Quoted in Hughes & Brecht, 1975).

logy : they include variations on a number of familiar tools — different types of interview and 'learning conversation', games, role-playing, problem solving, and so on — but also a number of content-free interactive computer programmes and grid techniques.

To illustrate this approach, I have chosen the very simplest grid technique of all, since it seems to me to bring out most clearly what is meant by Personal Constructs, how they might be elicited and recorded for observation, how this might help in the process of learning (to learn) and the role of the observer. In this case, learners were being helped to improve their reading ability and efficiency, but it can easily be seen that the same technique could be used for analysing, say, their reasons for learning a foreign language or their needs in that language. (The example is taken from Thomas and Augstein, undated).

THE GRID TECHNIQUE

The grid is a vehicle for exploring the experiental world (thoughts and feelings) of an individual. The grid elicitation interview consists of two phases. In the first phase, the participator is asked to name a range of " elements " which would define a " universe of discourse ". In the study, the universe of discourse was " purposes for reading ". Interviewing techniques were used to guide the participant into really exploring his or her own reading until he or she could name vivid examples of different purposes from within this experience. Eliciting reading purposes can be aided by talking the subject through a diary of reading events, covering a day, week or month. Each event can be explored to identify a reading purpose.

When a representative sample of elements (purposes) has been elicited the subject is then moved into the second phase of the interview. This is concerned with eliciting " constructs " and assigning elements to the poles of these constructs. Specifically, each purpose for reading is written on a card and the subject is offered three cards at a time. He or she is asked to think about the three purposes whollistically and to decide which two out of the three are most alike. Again, sensitive interviewing can enhance the quality of the response. When a similar pair has been identified the subject is asked to describe the nature of the similarity. This description constitutes one pole of the construct. A description of how the third card or " singleton " differs from the pair is then elicited. This constitutes the second pole of the construct.

For example, Sybil (grid reported in Section 3 [Results]) offers the following three purposes among her 10 elements : —

(i) Because it was recommended,

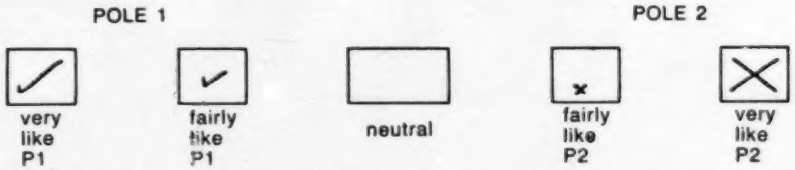
(ii) Revision for exams,

(iii) For reference.

Sybil decided that " for reference " and " because it was recommanded " were more alike each other than " revision for examinations ". She describes the similarity between the pair as " influenced by other people's ideas and choices " and the different as " set work under pressure ". Thus, one of Sybil's constructs was : —

Pole 1	Pole 2
Influenced by other people's ideas and choices	Set work under pressure

Once the two poles have been elicited, the subject is asked to imagine a five point scale, ranging from : —



This defines the five point scale. The subject assigns each element to a position on this scale. For example, Sybil rates each of her ten purposes for reading as : —

ELEMENTS									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
✓		✗	✓	x	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓

on the basis of her construct.

Using fresh sets of three elements, written on cards, Sybil continues to identify constructs, and to rate all elements on each construct, until her repertoire of constructs is exhausted. A systematic randomising technique is used for selecting each fresh " triad " or set of three elements. This ensures that no one pair of elements is repeated more often than any other in the combination sequence.

Thus, the repertory grid technique makes explicit a subject's views of significant elements in her thinking and feeling about a topic and the dimensions in which the topic is thought about. Constructing this raw grid is a useful exercise in itself. The subject becomes immediately more aware of the topic and of the framework in which she perceives it. However, focusing the grid produces a more powerful awareness raising experience for the participant. Elements are correlated with elements to produce a total " relations matrix ". This in turn can be cluster-analysed to reveal 'what goes with what' in the subject's thinking. Constructs can be similarly clustered. The Thomas focusing technique displays the grid responses more meaningfully by re-ordering the elements and constructs in cluster sequence (Sybil's Focused grid Table 6).

Table 6 SYBIL'S FOCUSED GRID
PURPOSES FOR READING

	✓	v	x	X	8 BECAUSE RECOMMENDED	4 REFERENCE	6 KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT	1 INTEREST CURIOSITY	10 PLEASURE	2 PASS TIME	5 OUGHT BUT DON'T FEEL LIKE	9 ESSAY SEMINAR	3 EXAM REVISION	7 SET FOR DISCUSSION
3.	CURIOSITY FROM OWN DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE		CURIOSITY INDUCED BY OTHERS' IDEAS		X	X	✓	v	v					
4.	PLEASURE, FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SATISFACTION		ANXIETY, NEVER FEEL TO HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING			v	v	✓	✓		X	x	x	x
1.	OWN INTEREST INDEPENDENT OF SET WORK		SPECIFIC SET WORK		v	v	v	✓			x	X	X	X
5.	INFLUENCED BY OTHERS' IDEAS BY CHOICE		SET WORK UNDER PRESSURE		✓	✓	v	v	v		x	X	X	X
6.	CHOICE BUT NOT NECESSARILY PLEASURE		SET WORK		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		X	X	X
2.	NO AIM, NO REASON		SET WORK WITH REASON AND PURPOSE		x				v	✓	✓	X	X	X
7.	NO AIM NOT HOPING FOR RESULTS		AIM AND PURPOSE TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE			X	X	x	✓	✓		X	X	X

Table 5 SYBIL'S RAW GRID
PURPOSE FOR READING

	✓ ✓	× ×	1 INTEREST/CURIOSITY	2 TO PASS TIME	3 EXAMINATION REVISION	4 FOR REFERENCE	5 OUGHT TO, BUT DON'T FEEL LIKE	6 KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT	7 SET FOR DISCUSSION	8 BECAUSE RECOMMENDED	9 ESSAY/SEMINAR	10 FOR PLEASURE
1.	OWN INTEREST, INDEPENDENT OF SET WORK	SPECIFIC SET WORK	✓		×	✓	×	✓	×	✓	×	
2.	NO AIM, NO REASON	SET WORK WITH REASON AND PURPOSE		✓	×		✓		×	×	×	✓
3.	CURIOSITY FROM OWN DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE	CURIOSITY INDUCED BY OTHERS' IDEAS	✓			×		✓		×		✓
4.	PLEASURE, FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SATISFACTION	ANXIETY, NEVER FEEL TO HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING	✓		×	✓	×	✓	×	×		✓
5.	INFLUENCED BY OTHERS' IDEAS BY CHOICE	SET WORK UNDER PRESSURE	✓		×	✓	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓
6.	CHOICE BUT NOT NECESSARILY PLEASURE	SET WORK	✓	✓	×	✓		✓	×	✓	×	
7.	NO AIM, NOT HOPING FOR RESULTS	AIM AND PURPOSE, TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE	×	✓	×	×		×	×		×	✓

The example given here is only one of a number of different grid assembly and interpretation techniques. Although they vary considerably, above all in statistical sophistication, the principle underlying all of them is that they provide the learners with " an objective correlative " of his cognitive categories in a particular area — a sort of " psychic mirror ". Since grids can also be exchanged and integrated in various ways, they provide a useful basis for comparison between learners and for the investigation of various aspects of group behaviour.

SENSITIZATION

" *If I don't know I don't know, I think I know.*
If I don't know I know, I think I don't know. "

(R.D. Laing)

« *Mais - vous voulez dire qu'il y a des verbes irréguliers en français !* »

(French adult learner of English)

As we have seen, with their common emphasis on learning and the learner, and on autonomy, there is a considerable amount of overlap between Personal Construct Theory and certain tendencies in applied linguistics. It is therefore interesting to ask whether there are already language learning techniques which are based — not in name, but in principle — on the elicitation and use of the learner's personal constructs.

Not surprisingly, this does in fact prove to be the case ; each time we ask learners to try to define or analyse their own motivations and needs, or to evaluate their own techniques and results, we are trying to get them to make explicit their cognitive categories, however fuzzy they may be around the edges. And the ESP teacher who gives his students a text on their specialisation and asks " Well, what don't you understand ? " is also allowing them to use their technical knowledge as a basis for hypotheses about meaning. Another example, and one which is far more widespread than either of those already mentioned, is *sensitization.*

By sensitization we mean the pedagogical technique whereby examples drawn from a learner's L_1 are used to help the understanding of certain characteristics of the L_2. As such it is not really susceptible to rigorous definition ; it lies between the two extremes of translation and a fully-fledged meta-language. It is a form of metacommentary, yet one which avoids many of the problems posed by linguistic terminology, since it reduces the number and technicality of terms which need to be used, relying on demonstration and intuition.

Since it is a technique which directly and explicitly involves the use of the L_1 in the acquisition of the L_2, it is one which touches on a number of psychological and methodological problems. The role of the mother-tongue in foreign language learning continues to be the subject of heated debate. On the one hand, there are those who favour the various types of " direct method " and who forbid all reference to and use of the L_1. On the other, there is the grammar-translation type of approach, which is essentially an explicit set of terms and rules for the reformulation of L_1 structures as L_2 structures. The " direct " method is based on the dubious hypothesis that one can learn one's first language twice, with no intermediate process of conceptual categorisation, while the grammar-translation approach involves the use of a detailed meta-language which " predigests " all the material to which the learner is exposed.

In principle, then, there is little in mainstream language-teaching theory which would seem to favour recourse to sensitization as a regular pedagogical practise : one would expect it to be regarded as a dangerous source of either interference or imprecision. But in fact it is one of the most common practises imaginable and the teacher who makes no use of it for even a lesson is a rare bird indeed. Whether it is a rough-and-ready analogy (" It's a bit like when you say... in French ") or a kind of grass-roots contrastive analysis, sensitization seems to be the expression of some deeply-felt beliefs concerning the nature of *explaining*.

This being the case, it is very surprising to notice how little serious attention has been paid to sensitization : is this because it is somehow " ideologically " unacceptable to most researchers ? My impression, after talking with a number of teachers, is that they feel that sensitization is somehow letting the side down, making things too easy and they have a niggling feeling that it is different from other techniques.

Insofar as sensitization calls on the knowledge and experience of the learner, it is a special case in a teacher-centered pedagogy : perhaps this is why teachers feel uneasy about it. It enables the learner to use his own set of intuitions and notions, not those of the teacher. Of course, this is what all learners do anyway : it really is rather pointless ordering a group of beginners to " try to think in English ". So in a sense we are making a virtue of necessity, trying to divert the process of interference to profitable ends. In the discussion of the examples which follow, I will try to suggest how this might be done and what the conditions are for a valid transference of this kind.

Example 1 :

A teacher trying to explain the nature and role of *segmentation* in phonetic discrimination for listening comprehension (and having great difficulty trying to avoid just this sort of vocabulary !) suddenly takes the example of the way in which the title of the T.V. " Collaro Show " appears in a number of different " arrangements " : Colle à rôt chaud ; col a rot chaud ; collard au chaud, etc... The teacher later also explained how homophones are disambiguated in context by taking a series of French examples (vers, vert, vair, verre, etc.).

Example 2 :

This is the first page of a module aimed at sensitizing learners to the ideas of

(i) different realisations for the same function
(ii) different registers or styles

COMMENT PRESENTER QUELQU'UN, COMMENT SE PRESENTER ET COMMENT REPONDRE

1. **Exemples en français.**

Présentation par une tierce personne :

O *A : — M. Chenal, est-ce que je peux vous présenter ma femme ? Simone, M. Chenal.*
B : — Enchantée.
C : — Très heureux de faire votre connaissance, Madame.

– *A : — Tiens, Dominique, c'est ma sœur, tu sais, celle qui fait les Beaux Arts.*
B : — Ah oui, bonjour.
C : — Salut.

\+ *A : — Venez, je vais vous présenter à mon collègue, M. Rossi, qui sera chargé de vous piloter dans notre entreprise. M. Rossi, voici M. David, qui vient discuter de notre projet.*
B : — Très heureux de faire votre connaissance.
C : — Moi de même.

O *A : — Sylvie, voici la nouvelle lectrice d'Anglais Sue.*
B : — Enchantée.
C : — Très heureuse de vous rencontrer. J'espère que vous vous plairez chez nous.

Les deux personnes se présentent elles-mêmes :

O *A : — Paul Duval.*
B : — Marie-Chantal Xavier, enchantée.

O *A : — Excusez-moi, vous ne seriez pas Madame Amont, par hasard ?*
B : — Mais si.
A : — Ah enchantée. Je suis Catherine Laval. C'est moi qui suis venue vous accueillir.
B : — Oh enchantée. C'est très gentil à vous.

Example 3 :

A small group of specialists due to attend a medical congress were having great difficulty understanding the authentic recordings with which they had been provided. Discussion with the teacher showed that at least part of the problem was at discourse level : in particular, they were unable to recognise references or quotations which were usually signalled by changes in key and tempo. By taking a similar recording in French, the teacher was able to draw their attention to these characteristics and their level of understanding seemed to improve considerably.

Almost every aspect of language can be illustrated in this way. During my own teaching in the past few weeks I have found myself using sensitization to explain such things as (i) the differences between comprehension and expression (e.g. the choice of the article is made for you in the one case but not the other), (ii) the differences between the spoken and the written forms at the syntactical level (greetings, etc., in letters, the *passé simple)* and (iii) differences in sequences of functions (you don't say " thank you " if someone pays you a compliment in French).

CONCLUSION

" *The French for London is Paris.* "

(Ionesco)

This quotation illustrates a major objection to the use of sensitization : it risks giving the learner the impression that the L_1 and the L_2 are " really " the same, resulting in something like word-for-word translation. This danger should certainly not be minimised, but neither is it going to be eliminated simply by refusing to use sensitization, since, as we have seen, the learner can only use his own personal constructs ; again, it is a danger which can in fact be countered by sensitization, as in Example 2, where one of the points being made is as there is no one-to-one relationship between structures and functions in the L_1 there cannot be a direct correspondence either between those of the L_1 and L_2.

To the extent, though, that " universals " do exist there seems to be no logical or pedagogical reason for ignoring them. This should not be taken as implying that sensitization should only be used for " high-level " linguistic phenomena (e.g. at discourse level) since clearly a concept such as " segmentation " is highly abstract. One of the main advantages of sensitization is this avoidance of metalinguistic problems : this is particularly true of Example 3, where the sheer weight of linguistic terminology and theory necessary to describe the discursive functions of certain prosodies would completely crush the learner.

After a very brief period of observation, it seems to me that sensitization serves, as the name suggests, to make the learner aware of the nature of the problem he is faced with. In Example 1, the effect of the teacher's explanation was certainly not to make his learners suddenly capable of perfect phonetic discrimination and oral comprehension. But it did seem to help them understand what it was they had to learn, and the same is true for the other examples given. In other words, sensitization is most valuable as a way of encouraging learning-readiness, or of creeating the conditions for learning. This seems to be confirmed by recent work on bilingualism (Skutnab-Kangas, 1976) which shows that a category acquired in the L_1 will be " sought for " and rapidly acquired in the L_2.

We need to investigate a wide range of different topics if the relevance and use of Personal Construct Psychology and snsitization in language teaching/learning are to be evaluated and understood. Topics which come immediately to my mind are :

(i) " Natural " metalinguistics or occurrences of sensitization : parent-child, helper-learner discourse, etc. ;

(ii) Techniques for the elicitation and recording of learners' needs, motivations, attitudes, etc. ;

(iii) Language aptitude, in the sense of judging the probability of success for a given learner in a particular pedagogical situation, such as an autonomous learning scheme ;

(iv) Learning techniques ;

(v) Discourse categories : it seems possible that recent approaches to the description of aspects of discourse, such as Brazil (1978) on intonation or Burton (forthcoming), on conversational strategies, might be susceptible to Personal Construct/Sensitization techniques, since they operate with relatively simple, limited conceptual categories.

Finally, this work might also provide a useful counterweight to some of the less healthy forms of interest in subjectivity at present prolifsrating in language teaching.

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